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ABSTRACT

Competence in humanities may be considered in terms of knowledge (the mental processing of information), thinking skills (the organization of knowledge), communication skills, and personal integration (the effect of knowledge upon the individual). Specific competencies to be acquired in an interdisciplinary twentieth century humanities course taught at Valencia Community College were broken down as follows: (1) knowledge and thinking skills--recall and interrelate important information, analyze another person's viewpoint, and judge the worth of a viewpoint using appropriate criteria; (2) communication skills--read difficult material, build vocabulary, express what others think in one's own words, and organize ideas and present them clearly; (3) personal integration--involve oneself in the material to derive one's own interpretation, examine personal ideas more clearly, choose and affirm one's values, and make personal commitments. At the end of the course, students were asked to evaluate their progress in relation to these competencies, and to determine whether the course had contributed to their improvement. Of the 36 students involved in the evaluation, no more than four students felt they had failed to improve in any one of the competencies. A list of students' comments about the course are included in the report. (JP)

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ED178132

An Interdisciplinary Course in Humanities at Valencia Community College: Goals, Competency Breakdown, and Evaluation

Valencia Community College

Orlando, Florida

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JC 790 595

EDUCATIONAL GOAL OF THE HUMANITIES AT VALENCIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Competence in humanities may be broken down into knowledge, thinking skills and personal integration. Knowledge refers to the mental processing of information. It involves competence in recalling what you have read, listened to or observed, since you have not learned what you cannot remember. It also means competence in grasping the meaning of facts and concepts you have encountered. And most important, knowledge includes competence in effectively communicating the information you have acquired. It should be understood that knowledge is the basic element of all learning and thus forms the building blocks of meaning.

Thinking skills have to do with organizing and using your knowledge. Skill in thinking involves competence in relating your knowledge to particular problems and experiences. It means competence in breading down an object or concept to discover its logical structure as well as putting elements together to form something new. Thinking skills also include competence to use your knowledge to make sound reasoned judgments. If knowledge forms the building blocks of meaning, then thinking skills are the blueprints or patterns which bring order to our understanding. Such skills are necessary in the search for meaning.

Personal integration means the effect of your knowledge on you as a person in terms of your emotions and values. It involves competence in becoming aware of your responsibility for your learning and openness to your unique feelings about what you learn. It also means competence to believe in what you learn and to recognize its value for yourself. Finally, personal integration includes the competence to do something with your knowledge and thinking skills to make you a better person.

A COMPETENCY BREAKDOWN FOR AN INTERDISCIPLINARY COURSE IN TWENTIETH CENTURY HUMANITIES IS AS FOLLOWS:

AREA I: KNOWLEDGE AND THINKING SKILLS

The area of "knowledge" encompasses the data or "facts"--the information -- which pertains to the discipline, humanities, which you are studying. Facts become useful to you and begin to make sense when you can fit them into a framework of thinking. During the course (and reflecting back at the end) you should be able to:

1. <u>RECALL IMPORTANT INFORMATION</u>

Recall significant facts, methods, themes and concepts which have been covered in the course.

This means you should know the names of creative people we have studied. You should be able to identify their method or technique: for example, that Picasso uses the Cubist methods. You should be able to recognize and recall themes like "relativity," and to spot the major idea of a period.

2. INTER-RELATING IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Explain relationships among facts, definitions, concepts and values.

You should be able to inter-relate all of these areas. For example, to summarize an artist's point of view by intertwining facts with definitions the artist establishes and integrate these with the concepts and values he presents.

3. ANALYZING ANOTHER PERSON'S VIEWPOINT

Breakdown an idea or object into its component elements through application of a rational process.

You should be able to analyze a person's perspective. You should be able to isolate premises and assumptions and proceed logically to conclusions. For instance, you should be able to examine and critically analyze a statement such as "existence precedes essence."

4. JUDGE THE WORTH OF A VIEWPOINT USING APPROPRIATE CRITERIA

Judge the worth of an idea or object using appropriate criteria.

To understand or to be able to discriminate objective from subjective support; rational from intuitive knowledge; emotional reaction from calm deliberation.

AREA II: COMMUNICATION SKILLS

No fact or piece of information is of any value to you if you cannot communicate it to someone else. It can even be argued that unless you can communicate a fact clearly you do not truly understand it.

1. READ DIFFICULT MATERIAL

Read and comprehend primary sources.

By reading the topics you should be able to increase your ability to read and understand difficult material that is written in various historical and personal styles. This should lessen the need to rely on second-hand or interpretive material.

2. VOCABULARY BUILDING

Define and use words which are essential to understand the topic.

This is vocabulary building in the area of humanities. You should be able to distinguish the popular meaning from the philosophical meaning; for example: in the cases of words like essence, dogma, subjectivity and objectivity.

3. EXPRESSING WHAT OTHERS THINK IN MY OWN WORDS

Translate facts and concept into a personal form of communication.

You should be able to express things in your own words either orally in class discussion or in writing (or both).

4. ORGANIZING IDEAS AND PRESENTING THEM CLEARLY

Communicate knowledge effectively in oral and written form.

You should be able to write papers and complete written assignments with a clear method of organization, precise, unambiguous use of words, good syntax and grammar, and logically reasoned positions, also, to practice in class discussion, presenting your ideas clearly and logically.

AREA III. PERSONAL INTEGRATION

Hopefully you will experience personal growth through this course. That is, you should begin to question and examine your value judgements, your attitude toward life and your goals. You should formulate new, more clearly defined positions and you should begin to feel yourself "coming together" as a unique individual within a community. Activities which I think move you toward this include the ability to:

1. INVOLVING MYSELF IN THE MATERIAL TO DERIVE MY OWN INTERPRETATION

Involve yourself directly with the subject matter of the course; not being content to allow others to tell you what to think or to interpret for you.

2. EXAMINING MY OWN IDEAS MORE CAREFULLY

Examine openly your emotional responses to the ideas encountered. Conquering fears about expressing yourself often allows you to confront your reactions to ideas without the fear of being "right" or "wrong" and to deal fairly with others' opinions.

2. CHOOSING AND AFFIRMING MY OWN VALUES

Choose and affirm the worth of those ideas which you find personally satisfying; being willing to publicly affirm values privately chosen.

4. MAKING PERSONAL COMMITMENTS

Commit yourself to doing something about what you have learned: choosing to act rather than to be acted upon.

EVALUATION -- HUMANITIES 2250

The following is a summary of some experimental evaluations that were given to students during the Spring of 1979. The general goals, the objectives of the course, were drawn up by the instructor and distributed to members of the class at the beginning of the session. At the end of the semester, students were asked to evaluate their progress using these goals. Below is a summary of their responses and comments (along with the goals and explanations they were given at the beginning of the session) and their "Further Suggestions."

AREA I: KNOWLEDGE AND THINKING SKILLS

The area of "knowledge" encompasses the data or "facts" -- the information -- which pertains to the discipline, humanities, which we are studying. Facts become useful to you and begin to make sense when you can fit them into a framework of thinking. During the course (and reflecting back at the end) you should be able to:

1. RECALL IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Recall significant facts, methods, themes and concepts which we have covered.

This means you should know the names of creative people we have studied. You should be able to identify their method or technique: for example, that Picasso uses the Cubist method. You should be able to recognize and recall themes like "relativity," and to spot the major idea of a period.

I have improved in this	Yes 35	No 1
The course has helped	Yes 32	No 2

COMMENTS:

My memory has improved from this course. My recall of names is better too.

Through this course I have learned a great deal of new and interesting facts.

I am able to recall things that happened at the beginning of the course that have stayed with me throughout the term.

Recall what? HA! I remember it all: Madame de Breyves, Sartre, McLuhan. The course was structured to retaining information.

Helped me to recall stories I read with better understanding.

My knowledge has broadened considerably since I began this course. I understand many things not clear to me before.

The course has definitely involved my mind with exciting information.

I can recall certain things that had an impact on my way of thinking.

It's amazing how much easier it's now to recall information. The course helped me organize it first, forcing me to understand and then remember.

My knowledge has expanded with the help of others, the book and also the teacher.

Although I disliked writing essays, they did help me improve in recalling important information.

While writing my final paper I realized I knew more than I had thought. I really did not have to consult my books much except to double check some of my ideas.

By having to substantiate our statements, we had to learn what we read.

Writing about these topics enabled me to make conclusions about the authors and therefore remember them.

In taking the kind of exams we did, you had to understand and remember everything about everybody.

Since each section related to the previous one, I was helped in retaining information from the previous section.

I am glad that I took this course because I can carry on a conversation with anyone about the authors we have discussed.

I gained, what I feel, is a valuable knowledge of the people of different times -- and why they changed. And, of course, the knowledge, the realization that I gained of myself is most valuable. The course opened doors to the reasons I have been going through a personal crisis.

2. INTER-RELATING IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Explain relationships among facts, definitions, concepts and values.

You should be able to inter-relate all of these areas. For example, to summarize an artist's point of view by intertwining facts with definitions the artist establishes and integrates these with the concepts and values he presents.

I have improved in this	Yes	34	No	2
The course has helped	Yes	31	No	1

COMMENTS:

A strength of the course.

I have realized that this is very important.

I've learned how to accept other people's ideas, even if I don't agree with them.

Showed me the way to understand viewpoints and compare them to mine.

I may not agree, but people do have the right to their own opinions.

Yes, to me other people's viewpoints were "ass holes." Everybody has one, but the uniqueness of the individual, well that's something else and I see that now.

I understood other's view points much better when I didn't feel I had to agree.

Although I have always been pretty open-minded about things, this course has renewed the meaning of the word.

This is however, a little hard to see because I seemed to agree with the views opened to me. I have tried (since reading Stravinsky) to keep an open mind and not prejudge.

3. ANALYZING ANOTHER PERSON'S VIEWPOINT

Breakdown an idea or object into its component elements through application of a rational process.

You should be able to analyze a person's perspective. You should be able to isolate premises and assumptions and proceed logically to conclusions. For instance, you should be able to examine and critically analyze a statement such as "existence precedes essence."

I have improved in this	Yes	32	No	0
The course has helped	Yes	33	No	0

COMMENTS:

I feel I have greatly improved in this area.

Definitely. We weren't allowed to just say, "yes or no," but you kept asking, "Why?"

My viewpoints and others have helped me communicate more explicitely.

This course taught me how to breakdown an article, which helped me a great deal in understanding.

You have a fantastic way of dividing in an organized manner, what the author is saying and how it suggests his thinking.

4. JUDGE THE WORTH OF A VIEWPOINT USING APPROPRIATE CRITERIA

Judge the worth of an idea or object using appropriate criteria.

To understand or to be able to discriminate objective from subjective support; rational from intuitive knowledge; emotional reaction from calm deliberation.

I have improved in this	Yes	24	No	3
The course has helped	Yes	25	No	3

COMMENTS:

Both subjectivity and objectivity improved in this area.

Learned to sort out the important facts.

I used to be a very closed-minded person, accepting only my own ideas. Everyone else's were wrong.

AREA II: COMMUNICATION SKILLS

No fact or piece of information is of any value to you if you cannot communicate it to someone else. It can even be argued that unless you can communicate a fact clearly you do not truly understand it.

1. READ DIFFICULT MATERIAL

Read and comprehend primary sources.

By reading the topics you should be able to increase your ability to read and understand difficult material that is written in various historical and personal styles. This should lessen the need to rely on second-hand or interpretive material.

I have improved in this	Yes	30	No	4
The course has helped	Yes	34	No	0

COMMENTS:

Greatly. Some of this stuff looked pretty hairy at first, but now I find that slowing myself down during the first reading of any difficult material helps me pick up more.

I understand articles better after discussion, but I can comprehend better on my own now too.

Definitely -- and I could see the improvement as I went.

Studying these people, reading their (perhaps) difficult material and discussing it in class has decidedly helped me in this respect.

The reading in this book was extremely difficult. I still have trouble concentrating on something I don't understand.

The book was hard to read but after several readings I could understand and relate.

The course has helped me to read more slowly, breaking sentences into fragments to look for specific ideas.

By analyzing and taking apart our readings in class, a better understanding was gained.

We were taught how to take articles line by line which helps in understanding.

I still don't quite understand everything but I know where to start to figure out what the author's trying to get me to think about.

I have always liked to read. This book was hard in a sense that I am not used to reading about different ways of life but am used to reading analytical books. It gave me a different type of book to read and try to understand.

The instructor, not only the course, made me aware of what I am reading, rather than just looking at the pages and going through the motions.

2. VOCABULARY BUILDING

Define and use words which are essential to understanding the topic.

This vocabularly building in the area of humanities. You should be able to distinguish the popular meaning from the philosophical meaning; for example: in the cases of words like essence, dogma, subjectivity and objectivity.

I have improved in this	Yes	36	No	1
The course has helped	Yes	36	No	0

COMMENTS:

I can't believe the words I'm using!

This course certainly introduced some new words to me and at times caused me to use some that I don't normally use.

Has been especially helpful with terms that are commonly used -- subjectivity, objectivity, rational, imagination, etc.

Some of the words were tough but it makes me feel good to know if I ever run across a word we have used that I'll be familiar with it.

My vocabulary has never been too hot, but in this course we talked about all these new words like pantehism, epistemology, etc. and this has helped me remember these words -- not like in an English class.

I use my dictionary much more and have quite a few new words in my brain's storage compartment.

I did keep my dictionary handy with each assignment. To understand these writers, it is imperative that you understand the correct definition of the words he uses.

Epistemology, pantheism, Neitzsche are just a few of the new words I've learned.

I can now spell epistemology.

My vocabulary had increased but my spelling has decreased.

This class has helped build a better vocabulary but I know it won't stay. Within the next month I'll probably be back to my simple little words. They are the ones my friends understand.

Because of writing all of these papers, we had to expand our vocabulary.

Writing helped.

By writing of ideas that I had never heard about before, my knowledge of words and topics have improved greatly.

Again, by reading so much and writing so often my vocabulary has improved.

3. EXPRESSING WHAT OTHERS THINK IN MY OWN WORDS

Translate facts and concepts into a personal form of communication.

You should be able to express things in your own words either orally in class discussion or in writing (or both).

I have improved in this	Yes	34	No	2
The course has helped	Yes	35	No	1

COMMENTS:

This course and the tests were about expressing other ideas. So I have improved in this area.

If we didn't know how to express the views of others, our papers would have been a shambles.

I am able to understand and express ideas more confidently.

I still have a hard time but I think I am getting better.

Made me get back into reading and enjoying.

I could be a lot better at expressing myself but I realize it's a slow process and I have to hang in there.

I couldn't help but improve in this area it was (personally for me anyway) sink or swim.

Was hard in the beginning, but as time went on, I feel I got better at it, and it has helped me personally.

Expressing what others think was hard at first but after trying to express what I think, expressing what others think is easy!

Especially in the class discussion along with each article I was able to express what others think better than usual. Understanding each one from class discussion was an important point.

By practicing writing, my ideas they improved.

I could say what I wanted to more clearly.

4. ORGANIZING IDEAS AND PRESENTING THEM CLEARLY

Communicate knowledge effectively in oral and written form.

> You should be able to write papers and complete written assignments with a clear method of organization, precise, unambiguous use of words, good syntax and grammar, and logically reasoned positions, also, to practice in class discussion, presenting your ideas clearly and logically.

I have improved in this	Yes	30	No	3
The course has helped	Yes	33	No	2

COMMENTS:

I think I'm getting better.

I learned to be very complete so that there is no question left in the reader's mind (sometimes).

I have tried to get my ideas to be consistent and in order.

By having to write so much, I think I learned much about organization in my papers.

I have improved in this area by depending a lot on outlines and rough drafts.

Through this course I have learned how to write a good (or at least decent) critical essay.

AREA III. PERSONAL INTEGRATION

Hopefully you will experience personal growth through this course. That is, you should begin to question and examine your value judgements, your attitude toward life and your goals. You should formulate new, more clearly defined positions and you should begin to feel yourself "coming together" as a unique individual within a community. Activities which I think move you toward this include the ability to:

I. <u>INVOLVING MYSELF IN THE MATERIAL TO DERIVE MY OWN INTERPRETATION</u>

Involve yourself directly with the subject matter of the course; not being content to allow others to tell you what to think or to interpret for you.

I have improved in this	Yes	35	No	1
The course has helped	Yes	34	No	2

COMMENTS:

Involving myself in the material -- the way we all seemed to get involved -- helped this class to be interesting and worthwhile.

I guess because of what I am experiencing, I found it impossible not to do this.

This was most difficult, because to be really involved (in order to understand and write about a topic), I had to temporarily believe it and some viewpoints were completely opposite from mine.

When you have to write them on paper it makes you sort your feelings out.

2. EXAMINING MY OWN IDEAS MORE CAREFULLY

Examine openly your emotional responses to the ideas encountered. Conquering fears about expressing yourself often allows you to confront your reactions to ideas without the fear of being "right" or "wrong" and to deal fairly with others' opinions.

I have improved in this	Yes	36	No	0
The course has helped	Yes	35	No	1

COMMENTS:

It showed me a number of ways on how life might be lived and didn't push any of these ideas on me but let me be free to choose.

I feel there is more to life than what I had always believed in.

My thoughts and emotions are beginning to clear. I have learned that I have been clinging to old ideals.

Definitely. I think everybody improved here. This is the first time I've really thought hard about what I was all about.

I have always had my own ideas -- this course helped me to stress and bring forth my inner ones.

Definitely! When you hear others views, it makes you think more closely about your own.

I learned that things don't have to be one way or another. I can be both.

In the rapid pace of today's world, it's hard to take the time to try to find out "why." This has given me a better understanding of myself.

The final exam helped the most.

This course changed my way of thinking, and thus, my philosophy of life.

3. CHOOSING AND AFFIRMING MY OWN VALUES

Choose and affirm the worth of those ideas which you find personally satisfying; being willing to publically affirm values privately chosen.

I have improved in this	Yes	34	No	2
The course has helped	Yes	35	No	1

COMMENTS:

Definitely did that for the first time in this class!

As Sartre would say, "I choose!"

My values had never been considered until I got in this course.

I am still not sure what they are -- but I realize that I must choose.

Without this course I never would have realized what my true values are or how to go about achieving them.

Made me believe that what I value is important even if the next person doesn't think so.

Although my values are the same, I wasn't sure how to put them into words. I can now quote others to explain and discuss my values.

It taught me not to be afraid of my own ideas. What I think is fine, even if I am the only one that believes it.

4. MAKING PERSONAL COMMITMENTS

Commit yourself to doing something about what you have learned; choosing to act rather than to be acted upon.

I have improved in this	Yes	31	No	3
The course has helped	Yes	31	No	3

COMMENTS:

I have really changed over the last 2 months -- for the better I hope. I no longer can be analytical as I was, but I'm afraid I'll never totally change.

I must commit myself to myself. To seek my own happiness. I have always had trouble because I put other people first.

My personal commitments are ones I do not feel as uneasy about as I used to. I used to worry what others may think. I always used to think they would look down on me for not trying for something better than being a music teacher.

I committed myself to learning in the course and I got out more than I thought I would.

This class helped me a great deal in understanding my values.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS OR COMMENTS:

I thoroughly enjoyed this class. Previously I was scared to death of Humanities because I didn't understand it. For that reason, I saved it for last. I wish now that I had taken it sooner.

This is an excellent course involving the thought process mainly because it deals with ideas of the present. The thought process helps people to think more clearly in other areas as well.

This course has been very demanding (but so has calculus!) in a unique way. There are few courses where you really look "inside" -- this has been one of them -- and pleasantly so. I have realized much from it. Thanks. (P.S. The first day of class you gave the impression that you were part of the Pittsburgh Steelers. I have since decided that you are not affiliated with them.)

I think that was an excellent course. It makes you think for yourself. I think you taught it at an appropriate level of difficulty. I would recommend this class and you to anybody. I got my money's worth! Since I was paying for you to torture us the way you did -- sometimes.

The whole course helped me develop reading and writing skills beyond what they were before I took that course. It also gave me many new ways of looking at people and the world.

It has been a good class. I like how you explained the course. You made me think.

I can't say how I feel about it. I have learned some things that will help me in my entire life. I wish it had been a year long course. I do plan to continue on my own -- reading the book and searching myself.

At first you came on heavy and I thought I wouldn't be able to hang on but you showed me that I'm capable of doing anything for self-reward, that I had no one to blame but myself.

This class has opened my eyes to many things. I have learned more about myself, and it has given me a positive outlook on life. I think that everyone should take this class. It truely is an eye-opener.

I have learned a great deal in this course and found it interesting.

This is a different sort of class which I have enjoyed and learned very much about myself, those around me and also from famous people's thoughts.

Keep asking students, "WHY?" everytime they say something.

I will recommend this course to my friends because everyone needs to be aware of the processes of knowledge and thinking. You are an excellent instructor.

Ms. Vandermast is a hard teacher. But I must say -- one of the best I've ever had. She seems to grade on individuality, which means I can understand the articles the way I want. I don't have to agree with anyone else. I enjoyed this course.

This has been an excellent course. I like your teaching methods and the way you <u>insist</u> on the student doing the thinking.

This course has been an asset to my life. It has served as back-up material for my views and opinions. I would love to see a TV program made in this form for the whole world to see.

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